

Studies in European Cinema

'He said we can choose our lives': Freedom, Intimacy, and Identity in Blue is the Warmest Colour (2013) --Manuscript Draft--

Full Title:	'He said we can choose our lives': Freedom, Intimacy, and Identity in Blue is the Warmest Colour (2013)
Manuscript Number:	RSEU- 2017-0021R1
Article Type:	Special Issue
Keywords:	Abdellatif Kechiche; Adaptation; Contemporary France; European Identity; French Cinema; French Nationality.
Manuscript Classifications:	230 Adaptation; 260 Auteur; 350 Identity; 50 French cinema
Abstract:	<p>Written, co-produced, and directed by Abdellatif Kechiche, the French film Blue Is the Warmest Colour (2013) generated a considerable amount of controversy before and after its release at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival. While the film is an acknowledged adaptation of the 2010 French graphic novel of the same name by Julie Maroh, it is also an adaptation of the symbolic function of the colour blue within French national and European collective discourse. Blue Is the Warmest Colour probes the very nature of what it means to be free on both an individual and collective level, drawing from the symbolism of the colour blue from the French flag. By examining the adaptation process from graphic novel to film, this essay seeks to argue that Kechiche's work is part of a wider debate in France and in Europe about what a contemporary European identity looks like, and where individual freedom fits into it. In this 'debate', Kechiche utilises the narrative of the film to question both historical discourses of nationality, cultural identity, and individuality, and their destabilisation in contemporary culture, thereby highlighting the limits of the ideology of 'Europe' through a distinct class politics.</p>

‘He said we can choose our lives’: Freedom, Intimacy, and Identity in *Blue is the Warmest Colour* (2013)

Hila Shachar

English and Creative Writing, De Montfort University, Leicester, United Kingdom

Address: Flat 19, Lyndhurst Court, 310 London Road, Leicester, LE2 2AP, United Kingdom.

Tel: +44 (0)7507338582

Email: hilashachar5@gmail.com; hila.shachar@dmu.ac.uk

Biographical note: Dr Hila Shachar is a Senior Lecturer in English Literature and a member of the Centre for Adaptations at De Montfort University, who specialises in the adaptation of literary works and authors in various media including film, television, and ballet. Her book, *Cultural Afterlives and Screen Adaptations of Classic Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), was featured in *The New York Times* and *The International Herald Tribune*, as well as nominated for the 2012 Western Australian Premier’s Book Awards. She also works as a writer for The Australian Ballet, and has a forthcoming monograph titled, *Screening the Author: The Literary Biopic* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

‘He said we can choose our lives’: Freedom, Intimacy, and Identity in *Blue is the Warmest Colour* (2013)

Hila Shachar

English and Creative Writing, De Montfort University, Leicester, United Kingdom

Address: Flat 19, Lyndhurst Court, 310 London Road, Leicester, LE2 2AP, United Kingdom.

Tel: +44 (0)7507338582

Email: hilashachar5@gmail.com; hila.shachar@dmu.ac.uk

Biographical note: Dr Hila Shachar is a Senior Lecturer in English Literature and a member of the Centre for Adaptations at De Montfort University, who specialises in the adaptation of literary works and authors in various media including film, television, and ballet. Her book, *Cultural Afterlives and Screen Adaptations of Classic Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), was featured in *The New York Times* and *The International Herald Tribune*, as well as nominated for the 2012 Western Australian Premier’s Book Awards. She also works as a writer for The Australian Ballet, and has a forthcoming monograph titled, *Screening the Author: The Literary Biopic* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

‘He said we can choose our lives’: Freedom, Intimacy, and Identity in *Blue is the Warmest Colour* (2013)

Abstract: Written, co-produced, and directed by Abdellatif Kechiche, the French film *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* (2013) generated a considerable amount of controversy before and after its release at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival. While the film is an acknowledged adaptation of the 2010 French graphic novel of the same name by Julie Maroh, it is also an adaptation of the symbolic function of the colour blue within French national and European collective discourse. *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* probes the very nature of what it means to be free on both an individual and collective level, drawing from the symbolism of the colour blue from the French flag. By examining the adaptation process from graphic novel to film, this essay seeks to argue that Kechiche’s work is part of a wider debate in France and in Europe about what a contemporary European identity looks like, and where individual freedom fits into it. In this ‘debate’, Kechiche utilises the narrative of the film to question both historical discourses of nationality, cultural identity, and individuality, and their destabilisation in contemporary culture, thereby highlighting the limits of the ideology of ‘Europe’ through a distinct class politics.

Keywords: Abdellatif Kechiche; Adaptation; Contemporary France; European Identity; French Cinema; French Nationality; Political Cinema.

There is a scene in Abdellatif Kechiche’s *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* (hereafter referred to as *Blue*) that seems to encapsulate many of the concerns of the film. Adèle, the film’s protagonist, is shown entering the sea for a swim, and all becomes static for a brief few minutes. We see her face shaped by the water as she floats on her back under the sun, both ecstatic and sad. The colour blue encases her like embryonic fluid, in the same way that it ‘houses’ the individual, political, and collective concerns the film explores. And here, blue is also referenced by an obvious symbol of water that ebbs and flows, and cannot remain static, however much we may desire that calm and certainty. I

will return to this scene later on in this article; but for now, it stands as an introduction to how I will tackle the analysis of *Blue* and explore its multiple collective and individual discourses of freedom and identity: through its blue ebbs and flows, moving from the personal to the collective, and the ‘universal’ to the intimate. But first, an introduction to the film and its director is needed.

Originally titled, *La Vie d’Adèle – Chapitres 1 & 2* (The Life of Adèle – Chapters 1 & 2), *Blue* received much attention upon its release in 2013, partly due to the controversy surrounding its content and behind-the-scenes drama, and partly due to the extraordinary performances of its lead actresses, Adèle Exarchopoulos (playing Adèle) and Léa Seydoux (playing Emma). Winning the *Palme d’Or* at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival, the film was written, co-produced, and directed by Abdellatif Kechiche, and adapted from Julie Maroh’s graphic novel of the same name, which was first published in English in 2013 and in French in 2010. The bare bones of both the graphic novel and film are the same: we follow the heroine, Adèle in the film and Clementine in the novel, through a *bildungsroman* narrative from teenager to teacher, amidst her sexual awakening and coming out as a lesbian. Her love interest, Emma, is the focal point of this desire, and the story of their love and break-up shapes the wider cultural issues both the novel and film explore. However, this is where their similarities end.

It is clear Maroh’s novel is primarily an exploration of lesbian identity in a contemporary cultural context, while Kechiche moves away from this desire as the only political focus of the narrative. The changes he makes to the narrative are specifically aligned with widening the scope of cultural critique; for example, Clementine becomes Adèle, not only referencing the lead actress’s real name, but also what it symbolises – Adèle means ‘justice’ in Arabic. This is not a small symbolic gesture from a Tunisian-born, working-class French director. The scope of what ‘justice’ and freedom

encapsulate in this film moves beyond the ‘justice’ of expressing same-sex desire, and for this Kechiche has been criticised.

It is necessary to explain the media attention and criticism levelled against Kechiche due to his representation of the female body and female same-sex desire in the film, as this criticism is something with which I both agree, and seek to move beyond in this article. The lead actresses have been vocal in press interviews in the lead-up to the release of the film about their experiences on set, specifically during the filming of the much-discussed sex scenes (see, e.g., Weisman 2013; LaSalle 2013; Roberts 2013; Aftab 2013; Stern 2013). The actresses claimed they felt like ‘prostitutes’ filming them, and that Kechiche’s general treatment of them on set bordered on harassment due to his demanding directorial style (see, Stern 2013; Aftab 2013). Following on from these claims, the visual content of the scenes themselves has been criticised as a male, heteronormative perspective of same-sex female desire (see, e.g., Aftab 2013; Stern 2013; Mayer 2015; Lee 2013; Maroh 2013; Dargis 2013; Jones 2013). I do not disagree with these comments; however, this is a complex, multi-layered film that cannot be neatly discarded due to its flaws in female representation.

Part of the problem of the criticism levelled against Kechiche and the film due to these particular sex scenes is that analysis of them tends to focus simply on them as representative of the film as a whole, devoid of a wider filmic context. In terms of narrative, the sex scenes seem to serve a purpose of ‘punctuation’ rather than the main images to be analysed, as they come after sensitively-constructed and more important scenes of family dinners – like the ‘dessert’ after the main meal. My analysis of the film therefore focuses on the ‘main meal’ rather than repeating the criticism about the sexual ‘dessert’. While not negating the valid criticism the film has received, I nonetheless wish to move away from it in this article to locate *Blue* within the context of Kechiche’s

style, his cinematic inheritance, and the multiple narratives of identity and freedom in the film. This requires a brief contextualisation of Kechiche's mode of cinema.

Kechiche's films have been linked with various styles of European and French cinema. These include the 'poetic realism' of Jean Renoir, the auteur cinema of the French New Wave, and the 'Beur Cinema'¹ of contemporary migrant France (see, e.g., Norindr 2012; Williams 2011, on this subject). There are certain consistencies in his aesthetic style and ideological preoccupations. Kechiche has a penchant for using extreme close-ups, and for long, aimless scenes that show the banality of everyday existence. He has linked his love of close-ups with a desire to use 'realist' cinema with a poetic inner 'truth' (see, Romney 2013). From this perspective, it is easy to see why he has been linked with the French realist tradition of Renoir, and with European realist cinema as a whole. From my perspective, a film like *Blue*, in terms of its visual style, reminds me of Vittorio De Sica's Italian realist film, *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), which explores the everyday banality of the working class in a poignant, poetic, but realistic manner. And class is a key issue in all of Kechiche's films.

While his work has inevitably been linked with the 'Beur' migrant cinema due to his Tunisian origins, he has himself made several comments that the issue of class for him is more significant than race (see, e.g., Norindr 2012, 56, 63). *Blue* is no exception, where he points out in an interview about the film that 'it's the social rather than ethnic aspect that matters', and that his position as 'working class' is what shapes the creation of his work (see, Romney 2013). This does not discount an exploration of racial and religious tensions in his work – indeed, in *Blue*, this is hinted at in several scenes – it only highlights the fact that class is the central issue around which all others coalesce in his films. It is for this reason that Panivong Norindr argues that Kechiche's films cannot be neatly categorised as 'immigrant' films (a condescending category in itself which

assumes that immigrant culture does not intersect with white working-class France and Europe as a whole), but a more general form of realist auteurship that addresses social justice, freedom, and class inequality (2012, 56). It is a position with which I agree, however, in the specific case of *Blue*, it is a position that needs to be considered alongside the question of whether this is also a ‘queer’ film.

While the film’s narrative borrows from Maroh’s preoccupation with queer sexual identity and female desire, Kechiche does not explore this as the primary focus but instead uses it as the springboard for a different exploration of class and freedom. This means that Kechiche’s *Blue* both exploits and critiques issues that have become aligned with queer theory, such as the absorption of queer sexual politics into capitalist, middle-class ideals. Such issues will be explored later on in this article, but it is important to point out now that I primarily situate Kechiche’s use of ‘queerness’ in this film as opportunistic in itself; and this is not necessarily an altogether negative categorisation, for it presents us with complex critique about the future of Europe through the focus on class. However, it is also for this reason that I am reluctant to call *Blue* a queer film in the same way that Maroh’s work has been called a queer novel, as the film seems to be more logically aligned with Kechiche’s cinematic preoccupation with class as the primary driver of critique. Indeed, when questioned about issues of queerness and femininity in the film in an interview, Kechiche reorients the questions back to the issue of class each time, and shows only a vague understanding of the specific cultural politics surrounding female same-sex desire (see, Romney 2013).

This should alert my reader to the fact that the way I therefore use the term ‘queer’ in this article is in its broadest possible sense, to align with the film’s and Kechiche’s logic. As David Halperin writes, queer theory is not only concerned with gay and lesbian politics per se, but *all* sexual politics. He points out that ‘Queer is by

definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant... “Queer,” then, demarcates... a positionality vis-à-vis the normative’ (1995, 62). Or, in other words, ‘queer’ is used in this article to represent a mode of critique that works against the normative across several different lines of thought, but primarily as it relates to class. It is a mode of critique that is explored through the contrast drawn between Adèle and Emma’s class positions and social backgrounds, and through the symbolism of the colour blue.

There are numerous symbolic connotations to the film’s use of blue, ranging from references to the French flag, the revolutionary cry of ‘liberty’, to more general artistic tropes in Western art and literature. There are also many ways that Kechiche uses the colour blue as a symbol of critique aligned with the issue of class, which can perhaps be summarised as its ‘rupturing’ affect, reminiscent of water that disrupts and represents, as stated earlier, the embryonic fluid before someone forms an identity and subjectivity. This is similar to Halperin’s definition of ‘Queer’ as ‘an identity without an essence’ (1995, 62). In *Blue*, the colour blue often assumes a poetic meaning beyond or before the representation of others – i.e. the venerated ‘truth’ Kechiche seeks in his films. This is essentially how I view the final meaning and function of the colour blue in the film: as a mode of ‘rupturing’ and destabilisation that questions the ‘essence’ of normative ‘truth’, seeking to explore the limits and possibilities of personal and collective freedoms in a modern Europe, but providing no clear answers in place of this questioning. It is essentially a symbol of critique without a final ‘essence’. It is important to point out however that this is not the only function of the colour blue in the film, which in other instances, is aligned with conservative discourses of normativity. Rather, it is the function that I argue is its ultimate power by the end of the film.

In terms then of Western thought, we can link this particular use of the colour blue with Julia Kristeva's theorising of the symbolism of blue, where the colour acts as a 'shattering of unity', representing a state of pre-representation (Kristeva 1980, 221).

Emma Wilson has explored this function of blue, where she quotes Kristeva:

'All colours, but blue in particular... have a noncentred or decentering effect'. This primacy given to blue... is also linked by Kristeva to biological development where she surmises that centred vision (the identification of objects) comes into play after colour perceptions. This leads to the conclusion that all colours, but *blue in particular* as the first colour perceived by the child's retina, take the adult back to the stage before the identification of objects and individuation. (Wilson 1998, 349; quoting, Kristeva 1980, 225)

As Wilson goes on to explore, Kristeva's theorisation of blue is centred on a psychoanalytic analysis of identity, and I am wary of psychoanalytic analyses, which tend to universalise Western ideas and concepts. I am more concerned with ideological and politicised 'truth' – the truth of cultural critique evident in Kechiche's own use of blue in his film. However, I am introducing Kristeva's theory here as it suggests a mode of approaching the various symbolic functions of the colour blue in his film as all directly linked with representational freedoms – who has the freedom to represent, how, why, and who does not.

This is worked out in distinctly class terms in *Blue*, through the conflict and love between the blue-haired middle-class artist, Emma, and the lower-class teacher, Adèle. In the process, Kechiche brings the collective and the personal together as a mode of critique. This bringing together, however, ebbs and flows; it has a rhythm and cycle in the film to be explored in detail in the next two sections of this article. In doing so, I seek to argue that Kechiche's work is part of a wider debate in France and in Europe

about what a contemporary European identity looks like, and where individual freedom fits into it.

This ‘debate’ ultimately suggests that the future of Europe lies in neither the old universalist discourses of the past, nor in the postmodern politics of queer representation of the present. That is, Kechiche utilises the narrative of *Blue* to question both inherited discourses of nationality, cultural identity, and individuality, and their contemporary destabilisation through a postmodern culture’s queer politics. He leaves us with a ‘freedom’ that is both a critique and an open-ended question about the confused, layered, and undecided politics of the times. The only real ‘constant’ in the film is the commitment to class politics – but to what end, and leading to what future for Europe, he does not divulge, but instead lets the viewer decide.

Flowing out: Adèle’s Collective Desire

In one of the opening scenes of *Blue*, we view Adèle intently listening to her female classmate, Saïda, who, unlike Adèle, is from an Algerian background, but like Adèle, from a similar socio-economic background. Saïda has been asked to read out the opening passages of Pierre de Marivaux’s unfinished novel, *La Vie de Marianne* (*The Life of Marianne*). Like Adèle’s story, this is a coming-of-age tale, with an amorous direction of sexual awakening. Unlike Adèle’s tale, however, it is also one of bourgeois advancement. As Spencer Wolff points out, ‘Adèle is no Marianne; no orphan raised by a local Parson, whose greatest goal in life is self-advancement. Moreover, this is hardly 17th century France. Adèle’s classmates are second-generation Arab and African students’ (2013). To expand on his valid points here, Kechiche’s opening framing of Adèle’s own sexual awakening and ‘parts 1 and 2’ of her life narrative through a re-

purposing and appropriation of Marivaux's tale of social advancement encourages the audience to view the issue of class from a distinctly contemporary context of racial and socio-economic inequality. As Saïda reads, she is interrupted by their teacher and asked to repeat the phrase "I am a woman"... start from there. You tell your story. It is a truth'. These words are uttered in between close-ups of Adèle and Saïda's faces, without viewing the face of their male teacher.

It is clear that Kechiche is here introducing us to Adèle and her story through a community with other women of her class, and also, via his recurrent use of bodily close-ups as a form of politicised 'truth'. It is a technique he uses throughout the first half of the film, where Adèle's sexual desire 'flows out' like blue water onto the collective terrain of politics. This seemingly innocent scene of schoolgirls reading a love story out loud in class sets us up, symbolically and ideologically, for what is to come in part one of the film and Adèle's life: a sexual awakening of a young girl whose sexuality is explicitly politicised in terms of her class.

If Adèle's desire and sexual becoming is politicised for us in terms of class right from the start, it is also immediately associated with the colour blue. On the outskirts of Lille, Adèle catches the bus to school from a distinctly 'blue-collar' suburb; she wears a blue scarf around her neck constantly; she bites a blue pen as she writes her feelings in a blue notebook wearing blue shirts; she is normally attired in blue jeans on top and bottom; she listens to Saïda talk about 'truth' and being a woman against a blue-painted backdrop; when she first masturbates to an image of the blue-haired Emma, it is within a blue bed; later that blue takes on more sexual connotations on the nails of a girl who holds her face and kisses her at school, the bed in which she loses her virginity to a boy in a failed attempt at heterosexuality (with bedspread patterns that mimic water), and the blue smoke in the bar in which she first talks to Emma. There is much more blue

symbolism in the film than what I have listed here – so much so that it often borders on symbolic overkill. However, it is precisely because of its overabundance that it signifies something more than simply the cliché of desire, as Kechiche has a history of utilising symbolism repeatedly, only to deconstruct it. As James Williams points out, Kechiche's films often rely on symbols with a distinct 'social and cultural history' only to 'destabilize' these 'archetypes and stereotypes' (2011, 400). The question is, what exactly is he destabilising in *Blue* through the blue symbolism? The answer comes in one of the protest scenes in the earlier half of the film, before Adèle begins her relationship with Emma.

The first protest that Adele attends with her classmates is a distinctly class-based one, where the working-class protesters are demanding education funding. Aesthetically, it is an ideologically slicing scene – that is, it neatly slices through pretences of a French social equality in its utilisation of imagery and sound. We first see Adèle's white face amidst the blue smoke surrounding her and the protesters, and the darker faces of her classmates. Ironically, it is her whiteness that seems out of place in this contemporary French class collective. But this scene is more about uniting her – a young, working-class lesbian – with the collective class politics of her friends, rather than creating racial distinctions. They are shown as a cohesive group, surrounded by the blue smoke they emit from cans, while chanting: 'No to privatization!' 'No to job cuts!' 'No to austerity measures!' 'More money for education!' Then, they begin singing a well-known song commonly sung at left-wing and Communist French rallies, *On lâche rien*, by the Algerian-born Kaddour Haddadi:

From the city projects
to the faraway countryside

We're society's rejects

always on the outside

We cannot find our place
we do not have right face

Born without a silver spoon
Inside a gilded cocoon

Got no home, got no job
Got no papers, we're the mob

They don't want us to unite
They've done, all right

Their world is a dog eat dog
In their machine we're a cog

Let's fix a new goal
Let's make their heads roll

We won't give up! We won't give up!²

The last line is screamed vehemently by Adèle and her friends as they form an image of bodily unity on screen. Ostensibly, it could be possible to view this protest scene against a logic of the failure of Western democracies to fulfil on the unified European dream of equal access to a shared economy and shared wealth. The references to austerity measures, privatisation of public services, and funding cuts to basic social and civic structures such as education, are issues that are shared amongst the Western democracies of the European Union.

Indeed, it is difficult not to view this scene, in retrospect, in relation to the recent Brexit referendum result in England in which many working-class voters aired a discontent with government policies of austerity, funding cuts, and a squeezing of

money to healthcare, education, and jobs, through an overarching discourse of leaving the EU. Like England, contemporary France, a once colonial power, is having to contend with privatisation, globalisation, and the decline of economic growth. Inevitably, this has been linked to these countries' place within Europe, and the question of whether national and personal interests can co-exist within a wider European 'project' of unity.

However, what I believe is really happening in this scene is that Kechiche is moving the collective rage away from the notion that the European dream is simply failing in the present; rather, his symbolic critique suggests that it was never a 'good' dream to begin with. This is hinted via the lyrics of the song he chooses for these young French people, and its links with France's revolutionary past and its Enlightenment ideals. If we examine the lyrics, they are telling in their references to the French Revolution and its symbolic, national function in the creation of a collective French and European Western identity. For example, the idea of the masses chanting against the 'gilded cocoon' with the cry to 'make their heads roll' can be read as a direct reference to the literal rolling heads of the aristocratic elite during the French Revolution, from which the values of 'liberty, equality, and fraternity' spring. In the French imagination, this revolution is distinctly tied to a modern, Enlightenment-based definition of 'Frenchness' and French nationality (see, e.g., Hewitt 2003, 1-16; Paulson 2003, 146-8; Daly 2013, 376; Caron 2013; 230, on this subject).

As Eoin Daly explains,

In the historical republican conception, national identity was to be defined solely with reference to the commonly held political ideas of the social contract – the principles of liberty, equality, fraternity, and so forth – which could be endorsed by citizens independently of their non-political or private identities... a republican sense of people-hood or common identity was distinguished from any *ethnos*. This

abstract definition of citizenship rendered it ‘universalist’. ... Thus it was optimistically assumed that an abstract or universalist citizenship could be reconciled with individuals’ right to exercise their private, particularist identities. (Daly 2013, 376)

One of the flaws of such a ‘universalist’ conception of national identity was that it failed, and still fails, to take into account that a ‘universalist’ position is not neutral; and indeed, that it masks a host of inequalities. That is, the concept of a ‘universalist’ national identity, based on Enlightenment ideals of rationality, did not come from nowhere, and primarily privileges white, upper-middle-class, male subjects. Historically speaking, it was primarily white privileged men who spoke for ‘humanity’, deciding the boundaries of ‘rationality’ and ‘reason’ based on their own subjective experiences and access to education, power, money, and knowledge; hence their perspective shaped what was considered ‘universal’ – and ‘universal’ rarely meant taking into account those in lower classes, women, and those of different races. Indeed, women were not even classed as ‘rational’ creatures, and not given the vote until 1945 in France. The hypocrisy of this position is that while it claims to unify and speak for the masses, it really can only speak for the privileged few.

The questioning of the French national ethos of ‘universality’ that unifies citizens through ideals rather than ethnicity has been analysed as postmodernist culture’s re-evaluation of Enlightenment absolutes about human nature (see, e.g., Paulson 2003, 159-62, on this subject). As Sanja Ivic and Dragan Lakicevic explain, the ‘Enlightenment’s philosophy ascribed unity, coherence and homogeneity to the concept of identity and, in this way, it ignored the heterogeneity and disparities of a number of social groups and individuals’ (2011, 397). In contrast, postmodern and poststructuralist thought sought, and still seeks, to overturn this rational tradition, which Ivic and Lakicevic point out has brought about ‘physical and political oppression’, noting that

‘Women, workers, immigrants and other social groups are marginalized and excluded in the name of “sameness” and universal principles based on reason’ (2011, 397).

However, as Kechiche’s film suggests, these ‘particularist’ social groups – the ‘rejects’ of the song shouted by a new generation of multi-ethnic, working-class youths – are rearing their heads in a contemporary France and Europe, probing the essentialist, universalist ideals that mask their socio-economic struggles. What Kechiche ultimately does in the closing of the protest scene is subvert and interrogate the symbolic function of the colour blue in relation to the French flag and its Revolutionary universalist ideals – particularly the ideal of ‘liberty’.

We see Adèle and her classmates drinking and smoking on the lawn after they are shown screaming and singing in the protest. Most of them are wearing blue, and as Adèle passes a bottle to one of her friends, we notice a sign behind them, in bright blue, that says ‘France, bleu’ with the word ‘bleu’ in larger letters. In the context of the film and this scene, I cannot help but think this is Kechiche’s playful reference to Krzysztof Kieślowski’s earlier film, *Three Colours: Blue* (1993), as the sign is visually reminiscent of the poster designs for Kieślowski’s film. However, this is not simply a playful visual allusion to another film that has utilised the colours of the French flag and its symbolism, in particular, the colour blue to symbolise ‘freedom’; it is also a deeper comment on freedom and class. While Kieślowski’s film sidesteps the issue of class in his consideration of modern European ‘freedom’ in the 1990s, Kechiche explicitly highlights it during a politically-charged contemporary protest. I do not think Kechiche’s visual allusion to *Three Colours: Blue* is a coincidence here when we consider that in Kieślowski’s film, the ‘freedom’ of the colour blue symbolically unifies its upper-middle-class French heroine, Julie, with her community and world through the legacy of her dead composer husband – i.e. his musical score, composed in honour of a

concert for the unification of Europe. The ‘liberty’ Julie seeks in Kieślowski’s *Three Colours: Blue* is that of freedom from social connections, only she decides to be reunified with the world instead, and with the optimistic ideals of a connected Europe. Perhaps this European optimism was fitting for the social context of the 1990s, which saw the consolidation of the European Union. However, it is not so for the disaffected working-class youth of the present.

The freedom that Adèle and her friends seek cannot be, and will not be, the same freedom; they are of a different class and different social reality than Julie. Julie has the luxury to escape social connections and social representation, because she is rich and privileged and can buy freedom (and a new house). These young kids do not – they either learn to represent themselves, or be represented erroneously as tokenistic bodies within a collective French and European identity that ignores their perspective. They cannot completely escape representation like Julie does. To me, this is not simply a critique of French national identity and its over-reliance on universalist discourses of being, it is also a critique of the concept of a unified European experience and identity. As Jean-François Caron points out, France’s dominant conception of nationality, based on the ideals of unity under a universal ethos of cosmopolitanism and Enlightenment rationality, is a ‘microcosm’ of the ideology that brought about the European Union, representing European identity (2013, 231). Kechiche is not content to let the symbols of this privileged universality speak as they have always spoken, instead he appropriates them on behalf of a new generation of working-class citizens, who literally scream to be heard. What is unified here is their class consciousness; what the colour blue fractures from unity is the historical alignment of ‘liberty’ with the Enlightenment ethos.

What is also significant about this protest scene is that it is intimately linked to the preceding one depicting the aftermath of Adèle’s break-up with her first boyfriend

and her creeping consciousness that she is not sexually attracted to the opposite sex. For her, this is almost like a psychic break. We see her crying in a blue bed, amidst blue paraphernalia, in the suffocating intimacy of her bedroom, then immediately cut to this protest scene. It is a clear visual alignment of her personal sexual identity with a collective class identity. That is, her sexual desire is the impetus for a collective consciousness, suggesting that what is at stake here is also a politics of personal representation. Adèle does not yet know how to represent herself, what she is, what she wants to be, and how much this is a politicised matter in her society. She comes to the protest still an innocent about how these class issues affect her day-to-day life and the most intimate aspects of her body, pleasure, and personal relationships. However, when she meets Emma, the issue of representing oneself, questioning the universalist discourse, and the role of class politics in this, become clearer. Kechiche brings the politics of the protest into the narrative before her relationship with Emma can truly begin in order to show us that Adèle's learning curve is not simply about realising one's sexuality, but that the personal is political many other ways. This becomes evident in the scene where she and Emma first spend some time together, talking about philosophy while Emma, the artist, sketches Adèle.

Adèle and Emma are shown sitting in a park, with the atmosphere bucolic in tone. The soft, whispery wind caresses them in the same manner as their flirty, tentative words and gentle smiles, indicating a growing attraction. Emma is shown drawing Adèle's face, but she explains to her that she likes fragmenting the body in her art – that is, she likes to focus on details such as lips, eyes, and so on. While explaining this to Adèle, she quotes Jean-Paul Sartre and his philosophy of existentialism: 'the mysterious weakness of a man's face'. Adèle is quite clearly shown out of her depth; she lacks the sophisticated bourgeois language of philosophy Emma wields so seductively as a

flirting tool. She is also too straightforward to even consider a politics of representation. As she tells Emma that she tried reading Sartre but could not understand him, Emma tries to explain the basic tenants of existential philosophy to her, saying: 'He said we could choose our lives', revealing to Adèle that this philosophy helped shape her lesbian identity. The thing is, as we move later on to meet Emma's family, we realise that this is an open, liberal family, that prides itself on representation. In comparison to Adèle's parents who view food as basic nourishment, food is representative of art for them. The contrast between the two family dinners at Adèle's and Emma's houses could not be more explicitly drawn – the working-class family eats spaghetti and talks about finding jobs and getting married, while the bourgeois family talks about art and eats shellfish while philosophising its texture.

My point is, for Emma, what William Paulson calls Sartre's 'commitment to universal justice and freedom' in his existentialist philosophy (2003, 156), seems accessible and viable because she is in a social position where she is actually able to choose her own life and to represent herself. Choosing to live within her sexual identity honestly does not cut her off from her family, friends, and community, like it does for Adèle. She does not think about the practicalities of basic sustenance and menial jobs, because she does not have to. She can wallow in abstract representation and universal philosophy, because she is privileged enough to have the resources and time to do so. The class inequality that is present in their relationship is highlighted here through Emma's position of wielding the pen of representation. As an artist, she fragments Adèle's face, and later on, the rest of her body, moulding her into an object of art. In fact, Emma seems to employ the logic of male artists who fetishise and fragment the female body in art and cinema while ironically talking about loftier ideals of human

freedom and choosing your own identity. It is, I argue, an intended irony and hypocrisy that shapes the development of their romance in the latter half of the film.

Here, the personal movement of Adèle from heterosexuality to queerness and her personal discovery of bodily pleasure in Emma is encased in a tantalising blue; the light blue of Emma's eyes and denim jacket, and the darker blue of her hair, all shot in soft, glowing tints, and intimate close-ups. Emma's blue is also the blue of universal existentialism and the politics of representation. The two are not distinct – Adèle's desire, symbolised by blue, is also linked with the discomfort caused by the wider, collective identities Emma represents. What we realise is that like in the protest scene, Kechiche calls upon the historical symbolism of blue, and moves Adèle's individual desire outwards toward a wider representational politics that she will have to contend with as a working-class woman. How she contends with it in the latter half of the film will be explored in the next section of this article.

Ebbing in: the Subjective Politics of Individual Representation

If the first half of the film focuses primarily on widening Adèle's sexuality and desires outwards toward a collective class consciousness, I would argue that the second part – the second phase of Adele's life and maturation into adulthood – explores the tension between her class position and a politics of individual representation. Kechiche seems to be creating a deliberate binary tension between the awakening class consciousness and unity Adèle was being introduced to as a teenager, and the more postmodern intersectional social movements to which she is introduced through her relationship with Emma. But what specifically do I mean by 'postmodern intersectional social movements'? While Kechiche offers a critique of the Western Enlightenment

universalism of the past through a class consciousness, postmodern intersectional movements could be said to offer a critique of such universalist discourses through their politics of a more subjective form of representation that highlights difference and multiplicity, rather than sameness. Against the homogeneity of Enlightenment Humanism, the concept of ‘intersectionality’, as coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, posits the primacy of subjective experience, based on personal identity markers such as race, religion, and gender (Crenshaw 1991; see also, Paulson 2003, 159-61, on this subject).

Intersectionality essentially relies on the notion that multiple social and personal identities overlap and ‘intersect’, resulting in complex and layered forms of power and oppression across religious, racial, class, sexual, and gender lines, to name a few. While ostensibly, this approach seems to mirror Kechiche’s own use of class politics in the film (particularly in the earlier protest scene), I believe he also offers a critique of contemporary postmodern intersectionality and what he presents as its wallowing in an apolitical self, rather than trying to emulate it. In *Blue*, this is primarily explored through the politics of representation that Emma introduces Adèle to. There can be no better example of this than the gay pride parade she takes her to, which forms an opposite mode of social engagement to the previous, class-based protest Adèle attended with her peers.

Wolff aptly sums this scene up, noting that the openly political *On lâche rien* has been replaced for the pop and club tune *I Follow Rivers*, by the Swedish Lykke Li, and all ‘around Adèle swim white, bourgeois, homosexual couples... What was once political is now just a party’ (2013). And here lies the crux of the difference between Kechiche’s class consciousness and the contemporary intersectionality he critiques in the film – his is a distinctly political approach, seeking to galvanise the subject, while, it is fair to say, there is a strain within contemporary intersectional movements that simply

wallows in an apolitical representation of politics, rather than in the politics itself. It is reminiscent of a recent trend of placing political figures such as Che Guevara on trendy t-shirts sold to teenagers in stores such as Urban Outfitters without a wider context of who these figures actually are; that is, the film's gay pride parade is representative of a wider trend of commodification and aestheticisation of real political concerns, where representation and 'image' have taken over politics. While Kechiche may show us in the first protest scene that, as Paulson has noted, 'Identity- and community-based movements have... come into conflict with the tradition of... secularism and universality of the French Republic' (2003, 161), and indeed, of wider European identity, he also then moves on to consider, through Emma, how these movements have been co-opted as a bourgeois 'trend' or 'look'. Indeed, this gay pride parade scene supports arguments made by critics such as Lisa Duggan and Susan Stryker about the commodification and absorption of queer politics into the dominant, normative mode of capitalism and contemporary neoliberalism (see, Duggan 2003, 50; Stryker 2008). It is essentially the fashion-like 'pose' of intersectional and queer protest, without the substance of political uprising behind it.

Emma's politics of representation in the latter half of the film requires some close analysis to make this more explicit, and to consider just what role it plays in Kechiche's own representation of Adèle's subjectivity and freedom as an emblem for the modern times. I would like to quote here in full Wolff's astute evaluation of Emma's character, which I will then move on to unpack and extend:

Emma, by contrast [to Adèle], is master of representation... her look is suavely curated to express her lesbian identity and supposed engagement. Yet, for all her talk about Sartre, she is not political in any real sense. She expediently drops her blue hair towards the end of the film when it aids her career. Moreover, her belligerent insistence on lesbian 'politics' makes her blind to the exploitative

nature of her relationship with the much younger and lower-class Adèle. (Wolff 2013)

There is much to consider here and expand upon regarding Emma's use of representation as an exploitative tool that ironically appropriates the tropes of queer and lesbian identity politics. I wish to do so by focusing on the first scene that 'transitions' us in the film from Adèle's old life as a student in her parents' working-class home, to her new life as a teacher living with Emma. This scene depicts a party to celebrate Emma's work, to which all of her artist friends are invited. It begins with tender close-ups of Adèle's hands and face as she concentrates on cooking for the party. Dressed in a simple blue vest, we soon realise, upon seeing Emma, that any symbolic remnants of the colour blue have been transferred to Adèle's body and have left Emma's body, whose hair is now a pristine blonde, suggesting that for Emma, the 'liberty' of blue was always a superficial 'pose' of art, while for Adèle, it remains an untapped political potential she carries with her as part of her *self*. As Adèle is cooking, there is a striking shot of her as the camera pulls away from its previous close-ups; on the left of the screen we see Adèle's real body performing menial tasks in the kitchen, while on the right we see a representation of Adèle – one of Emma's paintings – in which she is naked and alluring in blue. The contrast between the working body and the idealised, fetishised body is distinctly drawn here. Both bodies are in blue, but they represent different types of 'blues' – that is, they represent different modes of being, one of which encompasses the 'doing' body as a blue-collar subject, while the other the objectification of the working-class and young female body as art.

As the scene progresses and Emma's friends arrive, they praise Emma for her 'work', barely registering that the work of menial domestic care they disparage has been performed quietly by Adèle behind the scenes. Emma's friends launch into an overly

pretentious discussion about art and female desire, with Adèle feeling distinctly out of place. Her rescue comes in the form of the blue-collar and Tunisian-born Samir – a guest at the party who like Adèle, feels awkward and out of place. Against the pretentious conversations of Emma’s artist friends, which are mostly about abstract concepts, Adèle and Samir talk about Adèle’s pasta and cooking. That is, they talk about concrete nourishment and the everyday. From this conversation, we learn that Samir is trying his luck as an actor in Hollywood to get by, but usually gets typecast as an Arab terrorist. In a playful manner, Kechiche sets him up as the male counterpart to Adèle – like her, he suffers from exploitation of his identity on behalf of an elite group of artists who wish to pigeon-hole him through aesthetic representation. He is, tellingly, the only one of the guests to serve Adèle food and help her out with her domestic chores – the rest of Emma’s friends are happy to be served by her, and are clueless about the hypocrisy of their positions as artists supposedly championing loftier ideals while being served by someone they call Emma’s ‘muse’.

What is evident in this scene is that Emma and Adèle’s relationship has formed an unequal power dynamic. For all of Emma’s talk of freedom and justice and Sartre’s universal philosophy helping her form a lesbian identity, thus bridging the gap between the collective and the personal in her head, she is completely unaware of how she has recreated the exploitation of the past in her private relationship. It is clear that she has fashioned Adèle as the muse and object of the relationship, while she wields the power to represent and ‘guide’ her. This is ironic in the sense that Emma later gets angry at someone for not understanding her art because he does not understand ‘lesbian politics’, and yet, she makes no real attempt to understand Adèle as an individual from a different social background to her, rather than as a represented fantasy for her art. For Adèle, her sense of subjective fulfilment can be found in things Emma and her friends disparage

and take for granted; in the mundane, everyday politics of the home and the school. She explains to Emma and her family that she loves teaching young children because education and reading many books opened her mind to a world she did not know existed, and she wants to help other working-class kids feel the same. It is through Adèle's love of reading and teaching that Kechiche actually represents, however tentatively, postmodern social movements in a positive light, which Paulson describes as the 'liberation from the condition of being spoken for and represented, of being an object rather than a subject of knowledge' (2003, 159). But more often than not, that form of liberation is taken away from Adèle, and she is instead represented and objectified by others.

What is clear in this party scene is that Kechiche is setting up a dual critique of past and present that all coalesce around the figure of Adèle. She walks around the party serving everyone like a blue beacon of potential. There is potential for her, for example, to end up with someone like Samir, or to stay with Emma, or to forge her own path alone. The blue colour on her body here takes on a different tone to previous symbolic incarnations. It is here Kristeva's blue of rupturing unity, seeking a sense of self and belonging that can come only before or beyond the representation of others. What is at stake here is not simply the question of what Adèle will become, but also, what France's and indeed Europe's youth will follow and grow into. How can we conceive of an individual freedom in the future if neither the universal philosophy of the past nor the social movements of the present have brought about a true 'liberation'? I do not think Kechiche provides clear answers to this in his film, but what he does in the ending scenes is provide us with questions, possibilities, and ideas to probe for the future.

Conclusion: Blue tears

Before I discuss the significance of the ending in *Blue*, I wish to return to the water scene with which I began this article. Coming at a transition point in the narrative and in Adèle's life after she has broken up with Emma, what strikes me about this scene after watching it numerous times is how it eludes fixity of representation. After all the various modes of representation Adèle endures, is a part of, and learns of, this water scene is a rare moment of nothingness; one can only feel as Adèle does, the light on her face, the blue water surrounding her, like respite. Throughout the film, she has been the object of representation, she has skirted around representation herself, with glimpses of possible freedoms to be herself, but she has never really eluded objectifying representation altogether. Here, she is free from meaning, she is not even a beautiful body, she simply *is*.

However, the ending of the film takes us back to representation. Adèle sees Emma one last time at an important art show opening, where images of Adèle are hung on the wall in blue, with her fragmented body parts providing the symbolic backdrop for her real body, in a blue dress. This scene is familiar. Once again, Adèle is at a party with Emma's friends. Once again, she feels awkward and out of place. Once again, she wanders alone in blue. Once again, she is cast in the role of 'muse' while Emma revels in her role as master of representation. In perhaps one of the most condescending and de-humanising moments of the film, a reporter asks Emma what her model is thinking about, finding her 'empty gaze' fascinating, while Adèle is standing right there. Emma launches into another abstract conversation, and Adèle walks away, only to run into Samir again, visibly upset.

The viewer, like Samir, knows that there is nothing 'empty' about Adèle's gaze; rather, she has been cast in the role of empty muse for the representational affect of

Emma's lesbian identity politics via art. That is, we know Emma is playing a game of representational politics that is as porous and slick as the blue that once coloured her hair, but which she discarded when it was no longer useful for her 'image'; unlike Adèle's blue, which is a constant, visible reminder of her subjective self. What the ending provides here is a counterpart to the 'nothingness' of Adèle in the water, free from someone else's utilisation of her body, contrasted against the cold 'emptiness' of this representation.

The narrative does not end there, however. As Adèle leaves the party in tears, Samir is the only one to notice and run after her. Wolff has a particular take on this ending, arguing that the camera 'gives its final shot to Samir', with Kechiche reuniting the working-class characters whose 'class-consciousness has been suppressed. Now, though, their eyes are open. If parts one and two of Adèle's life recount her romantic coming-of-age, by having the film end with Samir, Kechiche suggests that her political awakening may be next' (2013). Wolff's is the only account of the significance of the ending I have come across. However, I disagree with his interpretation, as Samir does not enjoy the actual last shots and images of the film – it is Adèle who does. What we see after Samir runs out after her is him walking in one direction in the streets, looking for her, while she is walking in the opposite direction, away from him and Emma. As she is shown walking in the street, she is bathed in the bluish tint that sometimes comes at sunset, all the more evident in her blue dress. It is hard to know what the symbolism of the blue represents here, and what kind of 'freedom' Kechiche carves out for his heroine, whose 'political awakening' already began before she met Emma, and was cut short when she became art, an object.

Wolff's reference to their eyes being open, to me, has different symbolic potential, as the blue in this last scene is also representative of Adèle's final tears,

falling from her eyes. This reminds me of the ending of Kieślowski's *Three Colours: Blue*, which shows a montage of images of birth and sex, reconciling Julie to life, the future, and pleasure, as she is shown crying tears of release in the last scene amidst a blue wash. These tears are cathartic, and they are also representative of European unity, being played out against her husband's score for the unification of Europe concert, which has as its central artistic theme the philosophy of *agape* – what Paul Santilli calls 'something like Christian love' (2006, 155), or love for your fellow man, but reconfigured in the blue symbolism of Kieślowski's film as personal civic freedom, unity, and hope, within a communal, collective love.

Adèle's final tears do not carry this type of freedom, they are the exact reverse; her tears are the freedom of isolation and movement away from unification, objectification, and representation. She literally walks away from us into the blue nothingness of Kristeva's 'decentring' and rupturing of unity. What kind of individual freedom does this envisage in the present? A suitably complex, contradictory, and undecided one. On the one hand, Kechiche seeks to radicalise his heroine with a class consciousness in this film, but on the other hand, he takes that away from her. On the one hand he introduces her to collective unity as a form of resistance, but on the other hand, he concludes her narrative through a symbol of isolation and individual freedom. On the one hand he proposes ways that individual considerations of place, belonging, education, economic realities, sexuality, religion, race, gender, and local community affect someone's access to individual freedom, but on the other hand, he shows us what a farce of representational aesthetics this has also become.

Essentially, Kechiche does not reconcile Adèle or the audience with any type of existing or inherited ideology; which is, in itself, an ideological position akin to Halperin's broad definition of 'queerness' as an 'identity without an essence'. Both the

European ideal of shared identity and the more subjective postmodern intersectional politics have failed people like Adèle; the former because it failed to address the particularities of intersectional identities of difference, and the latter because it has become absorbed into a middle-class exploitation of social movements and queerness. What we are left with is, therefore, failure from all sides as a mode of contemporary ideological reality. There is not a more apt image with which to represent the current times, where contemporary European countries like France are aware of the failures of both the past and present, but are unsure what to offer in their place. Is there a future for Adèle that allows her to just be, just as is there a future for the European citizen that encompasses multiple discourses and has to contend with multiple failures? Kechiche does not provide us with an answer to these questions, only a small symbolic gesture that as Adèle walks away into the nothingness, the ‘liberty’ of blue may possibly be reawakened in the future.

Notes

¹ ‘Beur Cinema’ commonly refers to films made by French directors of North-African descent.

² It is worthwhile pointing out that I have transcribed these lyrics directly from the film itself.

References

- Aftab, Kaleem. 2013. "Blue is the Warmest Colour Actresses on their Lesbian Sex Scenes: 'We felt like prostitutes'." *The Independent*, October 4. Accessed 3 July 2017. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/blue-is-the-warmest-colour-actresses-on-their-lesbian-sex-scenes-we-felt-like-prostitutes-8856909.html>
- Blue is the Warmest Colour*. Directed by Abdellatif Kechiche. France/Belgium/Spain: Quatsous Films/Wild Bunch, 2013.
- Caron, Jean-François. 2013. "Understanding and interpreting France's national identity: The meanings of being French." *National Identities* 15 (3): 223-37.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6): 1241-99.
- Daly, Eoin. 2013. "Political Liberalism and French National Identity in the Wake of the Face-Veiling Law." *International Journal of Law in Context* (9) 3: 366-85.
- Dargis, Manohla. 2013. "Jostling for Position in Last Lap at Cannes." *The New York Times*, May 23. Accessed 3 July 2017. www.nytimes.com/2013/05/24/movies/many-films-still-in-running-at-cannes-for-palme-dor.html
- Duggan, Lisa. 2003. *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Halperin, David. 1995. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hewitt, Nicholas. 2003. "Introduction: French Culture and Society in the Twentieth Century." In *The Cambridge Companion to Modern French Culture*, edited by Nicholas Hewitt, 1-16. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ivic, Sanja, and Dragan D. Lakicevic. 2011. "European Identity: Between Modernity and Postmodernity." *Innovation—The European Journal of Social Science Research* 24 (4): 395-407.
- Jones, Kristin M. 2013. "Review: *Blue Is the Warmest Color*." *Film Comment*. Accessed 3 July 2017. <https://www.filmcomment.com/article/review-blue-is-the-warmest-color-abdellatif-kechiche/>

- Kristeva, Julia. 1980. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.
- LaSalle, Mick. “‘Blue is the Warmest Color’ A Masterpiece.” *Times Union*, November 14. Accessed 3 July 2017. <http://www.timesunion.com/living/article/Blue-is-the-Warmest-Color-a-masterpiece-4983466.php>
- Lee, Janet. 2013. “Film Review: ‘Blue Is The Warmest Color’.” *Neon Tommy: Annenberg Digital News*, October 22. Accessed 3 July 2017. <http://www.neontommy.com/news/2013/10/film-review-blue-warmest-color>
- Maroh, Julie. 2013. “Le bleu d’Adèle.” *Cœurs-forêts: le site de Julie Maroh*, May 27. Accessed 3 July 2017. <http://www.juliemaroh.com/2013/05/27/le-bleu-dadele/>
- Maroh, Julie. 2015. *Blue is the Warmest Color*. Translated by Ivanka Hahenberger. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Mayer, Sophie. 2015. “Review: *Blue is the Warmest Colour*.” *Sight & Sound Magazine*, February 20. Accessed 3 July 2017. <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/reviews-recommendations/blue-warmest-colour>
- Nonrindr, Panivong. 2012. “The Cinematic Practice of a ‘Cinéaste Ordinaire’: Abdellatif Kechiche and French Political Cinema.” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 16 (1): 55-68.
- Paulson, William. 2003. “Intellectuals.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Modern French Culture*, edited by Nicholas Hewitt, 145-64. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Roberts, Soraya. 2013. “‘Blue Is the Warmest Color’ is about class, not just sex.” *The Salon*, November 3. Accessed 3 July 2017. http://www.salon.com/2013/11/03/blue_is_the_warmest_color_is_about_class_not_just_sex/
- Romney, Jonathan. 2013. “Abdellatif Kechiche interview: ‘Do I need to be a woman to talk about love between women?’” *The Guardian*, October 27. Accessed 3 July 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/oct/27/abdellatif-kechiche-interview-blue-warmest>
- Santilli, Paul C. 2006. “Cinema and Subjectivity in Krzysztof Kieślowski.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64 (1): 147-56.
- Stern, Marlow. 2013. “The Stars of ‘Blue is the Warmest Color’ On the Riveting Lesbian Love Story.” *The Daily Beast*, January 9. Accessed 3 July 2017.

- <http://www.thedailybeast.com/the-stars-of-blue-is-the-warmest-color-on-the-riveting-lesbian-love-story>
- Stryker, Susan. 2008. "Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity." *Radical History Review* 100: 145-57.
- Three Colours: Blue*. Directed by Krzysztof Kieślowski. France/Poland/Switzerland: MK2 Productions/CED Productions/France 3 Cinema, 1993.
- Weisman, Aly. 2013. "The Film That Won Cannes Is Being Blasted By Its Writer As 'Porn'." *Business Insider*, May 29. Accessed 3 July 2017.
<http://www.businessinsider.com/blue-is-the-warmest-color-author-slams-film-that-won-cannes-2013-5>
- Williams, James S. 2011. "Open-sourcing French Culture: The Politics of métissage and Collective Reappropriation in the Films of Abdellatif Kechiche." *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 14 (3): 397-421.
- Wilson, Emma. 1998. "*Three Colours: Blue*: Kieslowski, Colour and the Postmodern Subject." *Screen* 39 (4): 349-62.
- Wolff, Spencer. 2013. "Buried in the Sand: The Secret Politics of *Blue Is the Warmest Color*." *The Huffington Post*, August 11. Accessed 3 July 2017.
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/spencer-wolff/buried-in-the-sand_b_4237379.html

**‘He said we can choose our lives’: Freedom, Intimacy, and Identity in
Blue is the Warmest Colour (2013)**

Hila Shachar

English and Creative Writing, De Montfort University, Leicester, United Kingdom

Address: Flat 19, Lyndhurst Court, 310 London Road, Leicester, LE2 2AP, United Kingdom.

Tel: +44 (0)7507338582

Email: hilashachar5@gmail.com; hila.shachar@dmu.ac.uk

Biographical note: Dr Hila Shachar is a Senior Lecturer in English Literature and a member of the Centre for Adaptations at De Montfort University, who specialises in the adaptation of literary works and authors in various media including film, television, and ballet. Her book, *Cultural Afterlives and Screen Adaptations of Classic Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), was featured in *The New York Times* and *The International Herald Tribune*, as well as nominated for the 2012 Western Australian Premier’s Book Awards. She also works as a writer for The Australian Ballet, and has a forthcoming monograph titled, *Screening the Author: The Literary Biopic* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

‘He said we can choose our lives’: Freedom, Intimacy, and Identity in *Blue is the Warmest Colour* (2013)

Abstract: Written, co-produced, and directed by Abdellatif Kechiche, the French film *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* (2013) generated a considerable amount of controversy before and after its release at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival. While the film is an acknowledged adaptation of the 2010 French graphic novel of the same name by Julie Maroh, it is also an adaptation of the symbolic function of the colour blue within French national and European collective discourse. *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* probes the very nature of what it means to be free on both an individual and collective level, drawing from the symbolism of the colour blue from the French flag. By examining the adaptation process from graphic novel to film, this essay seeks to argue that Kechiche’s work is part of a wider debate in France and in Europe about what a contemporary European identity looks like, and where individual freedom fits into it. In this ‘debate’, Kechiche utilises the narrative of the film to question both historical discourses of nationality, cultural identity, and individuality, and their destabilisation in contemporary culture, thereby highlighting the limits of the ideology of ‘Europe’ through a distinct class politics.

Keywords: Abdellatif Kechiche; Adaptation; Contemporary France; European Identity; French Cinema; French Nationality; Political Cinema.

There is a scene in Abdellatif Kechiche’s *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* (hereafter referred to as *Blue*) that seems to encapsulate many of the concerns of the film. Adèle, the film’s protagonist, is shown entering the sea for a swim, and all becomes static for a brief few minutes. We see her face shaped by the water as she floats on her back under the sun, both ecstatic and sad. The colour blue encases her like embryonic fluid, in the same way that it ‘houses’ the individual, political, and collective concerns the film explores. And here, blue is also referenced by an obvious symbol of water that ebbs and flows, and cannot remain static, however much we may desire that calm and certainty. I

will return to this scene later on in this article; but for now, it stands as an introduction to how I will tackle the analysis of *Blue* and explore its multiple collective and individual discourses of freedom and identity: through its blue ebbs and flows, moving from the personal to the collective, and the ‘universal’ to the intimate. But first, an introduction to the film and its director is needed.

Originally titled, *La Vie d’Adèle – Chapitres 1 & 2* (The Life of Adèle – Chapters 1 & 2), *Blue* received much attention upon its release in 2013, partly due to the controversy surrounding its content and behind-the-scenes drama, and partly due to the extraordinary performances of its lead actresses, Adèle Exarchopoulos (playing Adèle) and Léa Seydoux (playing Emma). Winning the *Palme d’Or* at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival, the film was written, co-produced, and directed by Abdellatif Kechiche, and adapted from Julie Maroh’s graphic novel of the same name, which was first published in English in 2013 and in French in 2010. The bare bones of both the graphic novel and film are the same: we follow the heroine, Adèle in the film and Clementine in the novel, through a *bildungsroman* narrative from teenager to teacher, amidst her sexual awakening and coming out as a lesbian. Her love interest, Emma, is the focal point of this desire, and the story of their love and break-up shapes the wider cultural issues both the novel and film explore. However, this is where their similarities end.

It is clear Maroh’s novel is primarily an exploration of lesbian identity in a contemporary cultural context, while Kechiche moves away from this desire as the only political focus of the narrative. The changes he makes to the narrative are specifically aligned with widening the scope of cultural critique; for example, Clementine becomes Adèle, not only referencing the lead actress’s real name, but also what it symbolises – Adèle means ‘justice’ in Arabic. This is not a small symbolic gesture from a Tunisian-born, working-class French director. The scope of what ‘justice’ and freedom

encapsulate in this film moves beyond the ‘justice’ of expressing same-sex desire, and for this Kechiche has been criticised.

It is necessary to explain the media attention and criticism levelled against Kechiche due to his representation of the female body and female same-sex desire in the film, as this criticism is something with which I both agree, and seek to move beyond in this article. The lead actresses have been vocal in press interviews in the lead-up to the release of the film about their experiences on set, specifically during the filming of the much-discussed sex scenes (see, e.g., Weisman 2013; LaSalle 2013; Roberts 2013; Aftab 2013; Stern 2013). The actresses claimed they felt like ‘prostitutes’ filming them, and that Kechiche’s general treatment of them on set bordered on harassment due to his demanding directorial style (see, Stern 2013; Aftab 2013). Following on from these claims, the visual content of the scenes themselves has been criticised as a male, heteronormative perspective of same-sex female desire (see, e.g., Aftab 2013; Stern 2013; Mayer 2015; Lee 2013; Maroh 2013; Dargis 2013; Jones 2013). I do not disagree with these comments; however, this is a complex, multi-layered film that cannot be neatly discarded due to its flaws in female representation.

Part of the problem of the criticism levelled against Kechiche and the film due to these particular sex scenes is that analysis of them tends to focus simply on them as representative of the film as a whole, devoid of a wider filmic context. In terms of narrative, the sex scenes seem to serve a purpose of ‘punctuation’ rather than the main images to be analysed, as they come after sensitively-constructed and more important scenes of family dinners – like the ‘dessert’ after the main meal. My analysis of the film therefore focuses on the ‘main meal’ rather than repeating the criticism about the sexual ‘dessert’. While not negating the valid criticism the film has received, I nonetheless wish to move away from it in this article to locate *Blue* within the context of Kechiche’s

style, his cinematic inheritance, and the multiple narratives of identity and freedom in the film. This requires a brief contextualisation of Kechiche's mode of cinema.

Kechiche's films have been linked with various styles of European and French cinema. These include the 'poetic realism' of Jean Renoir, the auteur cinema of the French New Wave, and the 'Beur Cinema'¹ of contemporary migrant France (see, e.g., Norindr 2012; Williams 2011, on this subject). There are certain consistencies in his aesthetic style and ideological preoccupations. Kechiche has a penchant for using extreme close-ups, and for long, aimless scenes that show the banality of everyday existence. He has linked his love of close-ups with a desire to use 'realist' cinema with a poetic inner 'truth' (see, Romney 2013). From this perspective, it is easy to see why he has been linked with the French realist tradition of Renoir, and with European realist cinema as a whole. From my perspective, a film like *Blue*, in terms of its visual style, reminds me of Vittorio De Sica's Italian realist film, *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), which explores the everyday banality of the working class in a poignant, poetic, but realistic manner. And class is a key issue in all of Kechiche's films.

While his work has inevitably been linked with the 'Beur' migrant cinema due to his Tunisian origins, he has himself made several comments that the issue of class for him is more significant than race (see, e.g., Norindr 2012, 56, 63). *Blue* is no exception, where he points out in an interview about the film that 'it's the social rather than ethnic aspect that matters', and that his position as 'working class' is what shapes the creation of his work (see, Romney 2013). This does not discount an exploration of racial and religious tensions in his work – indeed, in *Blue*, this is hinted at in several scenes – it only highlights the fact that class is the central issue around which all others coalesce in his films. It is for this reason that Panivong Norindr argues that Kechiche's films cannot be neatly categorised as 'immigrant' films (a condescending category in itself which

assumes that immigrant culture does not intersect with white working-class France and Europe as a whole), but a more general form of realist auteurship that addresses social justice, freedom, and class inequality (2012, 56). It is a position with which I agree, however, in the specific case of *Blue*, it is a position that needs to be considered alongside the question of whether this is also a ‘queer’ film.

While the film’s narrative borrows from Maroh’s preoccupation with queer sexual identity and female desire, Kechiche does not explore this as the primary focus but instead uses it as the springboard for a different exploration of class and freedom. This means that Kechiche’s *Blue* both exploits and critiques issues that have become aligned with queer theory, such as the absorption of queer sexual politics into capitalist, middle-class ideals. Such issues will be explored later on in this article, but it is important to point out now that I primarily situate Kechiche’s use of ‘queerness’ in this film as opportunistic in itself; and this is not necessarily an altogether negative categorisation, for it presents us with complex critique about the future of Europe through the focus on class. However, it is also for this reason that I am reluctant to call *Blue* a queer film in the same way that Maroh’s work has been called a queer novel, as the film seems to be more logically aligned with Kechiche’s cinematic preoccupation with class as the primary driver of critique. Indeed, when questioned about issues of queerness and femininity in the film in an interview, Kechiche reorients the questions back to the issue of class each time, and shows only a vague understanding of the specific cultural politics surrounding female same-sex desire (see, Romney 2013).

This should alert my reader to the fact that the way I therefore use the term ‘queer’ in this article is in its broadest possible sense, to align with the film’s and Kechiche’s logic. As David Halperin writes, queer theory is not only concerned with gay and lesbian politics per se, but *all* sexual politics. He points out that ‘Queer is by

definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant... “Queer,” then, demarcates... a positionality vis-à-vis the normative’ (1995, 62). Or, in other words, ‘queer’ is used in this article to represent a mode of critique that works against the normative across several different lines of thought, but primarily as it relates to class. It is a mode of critique that is explored through the contrast drawn between Adèle and Emma’s class positions and social backgrounds, and through the symbolism of the colour blue.

There are numerous symbolic connotations to the film’s use of blue, ranging from references to the French flag, the revolutionary cry of ‘liberty’, to more general artistic tropes in Western art and literature. There are also many ways that Kechiche uses the colour blue as a symbol of critique aligned with the issue of class, which can perhaps be summarised as its ‘rupturing’ affect, reminiscent of water that disrupts and represents, as stated earlier, the embryonic fluid before someone forms an identity and subjectivity. This is similar to Halperin’s definition of ‘Queer’ as ‘an identity without an essence’ (1995, 62). In *Blue*, the colour blue often assumes a poetic meaning beyond or before the representation of others – i.e. the venerated ‘truth’ Kechiche seeks in his films. This is essentially how I view the final meaning and function of the colour blue in the film: as a mode of ‘rupturing’ and destabilisation that questions the ‘essence’ of normative ‘truth’, seeking to explore the limits and possibilities of personal and collective freedoms in a modern Europe, but providing no clear answers in place of this questioning. It is essentially a symbol of critique without a final ‘essence’. It is important to point out however that this is not the only function of the colour blue in the film, which in other instances, is aligned with conservative discourses of normativity. Rather, it is the function that I argue is its ultimate power by the end of the film.

In terms then of Western thought, we can link this particular use of the colour blue with Julia Kristeva's theorising of the symbolism of blue, where the colour acts as a 'shattering of unity', representing a state of pre-representation (Kristeva 1980, 221).

Emma Wilson has explored this function of blue, where she quotes Kristeva:

'All colours, but blue in particular... have a noncentred or decentering effect'. This primacy given to blue... is also linked by Kristeva to biological development where she surmises that centred vision (the identification of objects) comes into play after colour perceptions. This leads to the conclusion that all colours, but *blue in particular* as the first colour perceived by the child's retina, take the adult back to the stage before the identification of objects and individuation. (Wilson 1998, 349; quoting, Kristeva 1980, 225)

As Wilson goes on to explore, Kristeva's theorisation of blue is centred on a psychoanalytic analysis of identity, and I am wary of psychoanalytic analyses, which tend to universalise Western ideas and concepts. I am more concerned with ideological and politicised 'truth' – the truth of cultural critique evident in Kechiche's own use of blue in his film. However, I am introducing Kristeva's theory here as it suggests a mode of approaching the various symbolic functions of the colour blue in his film as all directly linked with representational freedoms – who has the freedom to represent, how, why, and who does not.

This is worked out in distinctly class terms in *Blue*, through the conflict and love between the blue-haired middle-class artist, Emma, and the lower-class teacher, Adèle. In the process, Kechiche brings the collective and the personal together as a mode of critique. This bringing together, however, ebbs and flows; it has a rhythm and cycle in the film to be explored in detail in the next two sections of this article. In doing so, I seek to argue that Kechiche's work is part of a wider debate in France and in Europe

about what a contemporary European identity looks like, and where individual freedom fits into it.

This ‘debate’ ultimately suggests that the future of Europe lies in neither the old universalist discourses of the past, nor in the postmodern politics of queer representation of the present. That is, Kechiche utilises the narrative of *Blue* to question both inherited discourses of nationality, cultural identity, and individuality, and their contemporary destabilisation through a postmodern culture’s queer politics. He leaves us with a ‘freedom’ that is both a critique and an open-ended question about the confused, layered, and undecided politics of the times. The only real ‘constant’ in the film is the commitment to class politics – but to what end, and leading to what future for Europe, he does not divulge, but instead lets the viewer decide.

Flowing out: Adèle’s Collective Desire

In one of the opening scenes of *Blue*, we view Adèle intently listening to her female classmate, Saïda, who, unlike Adèle, is from an Algerian background, but like Adèle, from a similar socio-economic background. Saïda has been asked to read out the opening passages of Pierre de Marivaux’s unfinished novel, *La Vie de Marianne* (*The Life of Marianne*). Like Adèle’s story, this is a coming-of-age tale, with an amorous direction of sexual awakening. Unlike Adèle’s tale, however, it is also one of bourgeois advancement. As Spencer Wolff points out, ‘Adèle is no Marianne; no orphan raised by a local Parson, whose greatest goal in life is self-advancement. Moreover, this is hardly 17th century France. Adèle’s classmates are second-generation Arab and African students’ (2013). To expand on his valid points here, Kechiche’s opening framing of Adèle’s own sexual awakening and ‘parts 1 and 2’ of her life narrative through a re-

purposing and appropriation of Marivaux's tale of social advancement encourages the audience to view the issue of class from a distinctly contemporary context of racial and socio-economic inequality. As Saïda reads, she is interrupted by their teacher and asked to repeat the phrase "I am a woman"... start from there. You tell your story. It is a truth'. These words are uttered in between close-ups of Adèle and Saïda's faces, without viewing the face of their male teacher.

It is clear that Kechiche is here introducing us to Adèle and her story through a community with other women of her class, and also, via his recurrent use of bodily close-ups as a form of politicised 'truth'. It is a technique he uses throughout the first half of the film, where Adèle's sexual desire 'flows out' like blue water onto the collective terrain of politics. This seemingly innocent scene of schoolgirls reading a love story out loud in class sets us up, symbolically and ideologically, for what is to come in part one of the film and Adèle's life: a sexual awakening of a young girl whose sexuality is explicitly politicised in terms of her class.

If Adèle's desire and sexual becoming is politicised for us in terms of class right from the start, it is also immediately associated with the colour blue. On the outskirts of Lille, Adèle catches the bus to school from a distinctly 'blue-collar' suburb; she wears a blue scarf around her neck constantly; she bites a blue pen as she writes her feelings in a blue notebook wearing blue shirts; she is normally attired in blue jeans on top and bottom; she listens to Saïda talk about 'truth' and being a woman against a blue-painted backdrop; when she first masturbates to an image of the blue-haired Emma, it is within a blue bed; later that blue takes on more sexual connotations on the nails of a girl who holds her face and kisses her at school, the bed in which she loses her virginity to a boy in a failed attempt at heterosexuality (with bedspread patterns that mimic water), and the blue smoke in the bar in which she first talks to Emma. There is much more blue

symbolism in the film than what I have listed here – so much so that it often borders on symbolic overkill. However, it is precisely because of its overabundance that it signifies something more than simply the cliché of desire, as Kechiche has a history of utilising symbolism repeatedly, only to deconstruct it. As James Williams points out, Kechiche's films often rely on symbols with a distinct 'social and cultural history' only to 'destabilize' these 'archetypes and stereotypes' (2011, 400). The question is, what exactly is he destabilising in *Blue* through the blue symbolism? The answer comes in one of the protest scenes in the earlier half of the film, before Adèle begins her relationship with Emma.

The first protest that Adele attends with her classmates is a distinctly class-based one, where the working-class protesters are demanding education funding.

Aesthetically, it is an ideologically slicing scene – that is, it neatly slices through pretences of a French social equality in its utilisation of imagery and sound. We first see Adèle's white face amidst the blue smoke surrounding her and the protesters, and the darker faces of her classmates. Ironically, it is her whiteness that seems out of place in this contemporary French class collective. But this scene is more about uniting her – a young, working-class lesbian – with the collective class politics of her friends, rather than creating racial distinctions. They are shown as a cohesive group, surrounded by the blue smoke they emit from cans, while chanting: 'No to privatization!' 'No to job cuts!' 'No to austerity measures!' 'More money for education!' Then, they begin singing a well-known song commonly sung at left-wing and Communist French rallies, *On lâche rien*, by the Algerian-born Kaddour Haddadi:

From the city projects
to the faraway countryside

We're society's rejects

always on the outside

We cannot find our place
we do not have right face

Born without a silver spoon
Inside a gilded cocoon

Got no home, got no job
Got no papers, we're the mob

They don't want us to unite
They've done, all right

Their world is a dog eat dog
In their machine we're a cog

Let's fix a new goal
Let's make their heads roll

We won't give up! We won't give up!²

The last line is screamed vehemently by Adèle and her friends as they form an image of bodily unity on screen. Ostensibly, it could be possible to view this protest scene against a logic of the failure of Western democracies to fulfil on the unified European dream of equal access to a shared economy and shared wealth. The references to austerity measures, privatisation of public services, and funding cuts to basic social and civic structures such as education, are issues that are shared amongst the Western democracies of the European Union.

Indeed, it is difficult not to view this scene, in retrospect, in relation to the recent Brexit referendum result in England in which many working-class voters aired a discontent with government policies of austerity, funding cuts, and a squeezing of

money to healthcare, education, and jobs, through an overarching discourse of leaving the EU. Like England, contemporary France, a once colonial power, is having to contend with privatisation, globalisation, and the decline of economic growth. Inevitably, this has been linked to these countries' place within Europe, and the question of whether national and personal interests can co-exist within a wider European 'project' of unity.

However, what I believe is really happening in this scene is that Kechiche is moving the collective rage away from the notion that the European dream is simply failing in the present; rather, his symbolic critique suggests that it was never a 'good' dream to begin with. This is hinted via the lyrics of the song he chooses for these young French people, and its links with France's revolutionary past and its Enlightenment ideals. If we examine the lyrics, they are telling in their references to the French Revolution and its symbolic, national function in the creation of a collective French and European Western identity. For example, the idea of the masses chanting against the 'gilded cocoon' with the cry to 'make their heads roll' can be read as a direct reference to the literal rolling heads of the aristocratic elite during the French Revolution, from which the values of 'liberty, equality, and fraternity' spring. In the French imagination, this revolution is distinctly tied to a modern, Enlightenment-based definition of 'Frenchness' and French nationality (see, e.g., Hewitt 2003, 1-16; Paulson 2003, 146-8; Daly 2013, 376; Caron 2013; 230, on this subject).

As Eoin Daly explains,

In the historical republican conception, national identity was to be defined solely with reference to the commonly held political ideas of the social contract – the principles of liberty, equality, fraternity, and so forth – which could be endorsed by citizens independently of their non-political or private identities... a republican sense of people-hood or common identity was distinguished from any *ethnos*. This

abstract definition of citizenship rendered it ‘universalist’. ... Thus it was optimistically assumed that an abstract or universalist citizenship could be reconciled with individuals’ right to exercise their private, particularist identities. (Daly 2013, 376)

One of the flaws of such a ‘universalist’ conception of national identity was that it failed, and still fails, to take into account that a ‘universalist’ position is not neutral; and indeed, that it masks a host of inequalities. That is, the concept of a ‘universalist’ national identity, based on Enlightenment ideals of rationality, did not come from nowhere, and primarily privileges white, upper-middle-class, male subjects. Historically speaking, it was primarily white privileged men who spoke for ‘humanity’, deciding the boundaries of ‘rationality’ and ‘reason’ based on their own subjective experiences and access to education, power, money, and knowledge; hence their perspective shaped what was considered ‘universal’ – and ‘universal’ rarely meant taking into account those in lower classes, women, and those of different races. Indeed, women were not even classed as ‘rational’ creatures, and not given the vote until 1945 in France. The hypocrisy of this position is that while it claims to unify and speak for the masses, it really can only speak for the privileged few.

The questioning of the French national ethos of ‘universality’ that unifies citizens through ideals rather than ethnicity has been analysed as postmodernist culture’s re-evaluation of Enlightenment absolutes about human nature (see, e.g., Paulson 2003, 159-62, on this subject). As Sanja Ivic and Dragan Lakicevic explain, the ‘Enlightenment’s philosophy ascribed unity, coherence and homogeneity to the concept of identity and, in this way, it ignored the heterogeneity and disparities of a number of social groups and individuals’ (2011, 397). In contrast, postmodern and poststructuralist thought sought, and still seeks, to overturn this rational tradition, which Ivic and Lakicevic point out has brought about ‘physical and political oppression’, noting that

‘Women, workers, immigrants and other social groups are marginalized and excluded in the name of “sameness” and universal principles based on reason’ (2011, 397).

However, as Kechiche’s film suggests, these ‘particularist’ social groups – the ‘rejects’ of the song shouted by a new generation of multi-ethnic, working-class youths – are rearing their heads in a contemporary France and Europe, probing the essentialist, universalist ideals that mask their socio-economic struggles. What Kechiche ultimately does in the closing of the protest scene is subvert and interrogate the symbolic function of the colour blue in relation to the French flag and its Revolutionary universalist ideals – particularly the ideal of ‘liberty’.

We see Adèle and her classmates drinking and smoking on the lawn after they are shown screaming and singing in the protest. Most of them are wearing blue, and as Adèle passes a bottle to one of her friends, we notice a sign behind them, in bright blue, that says ‘France, bleu’ with the word ‘bleu’ in larger letters. In the context of the film and this scene, I cannot help but think this is Kechiche’s playful reference to Krzysztof Kieślowski’s earlier film, *Three Colours: Blue* (1993), as the sign is visually reminiscent of the poster designs for Kieślowski’s film. However, this is not simply a playful visual allusion to another film that has utilised the colours of the French flag and its symbolism, in particular, the colour blue to symbolise ‘freedom’; it is also a deeper comment on freedom and class. While Kieślowski’s film sidesteps the issue of class in his consideration of modern European ‘freedom’ in the 1990s, Kechiche explicitly highlights it during a politically-charged contemporary protest. I do not think Kechiche’s visual allusion to *Three Colours: Blue* is a coincidence here when we consider that in Kieślowski’s film, the ‘freedom’ of the colour blue symbolically unifies its upper-middle-class French heroine, Julie, with her community and world through the legacy of her dead composer husband – i.e. his musical score, composed in honour of a

concert for the unification of Europe. The ‘liberty’ Julie seeks in Kieślowski’s *Three Colours: Blue* is that of freedom from social connections, only she decides to be reunified with the world instead, and with the optimistic ideals of a connected Europe. Perhaps this European optimism was fitting for the social context of the 1990s, which saw the consolidation of the European Union. However, it is not so for the disaffected working-class youth of the present.

The freedom that Adèle and her friends seek cannot be, and will not be, the same freedom; they are of a different class and different social reality than Julie. Julie has the luxury to escape social connections and social representation, because she is rich and privileged and can buy freedom (and a new house). These young kids do not – they either learn to represent themselves, or be represented erroneously as tokenistic bodies within a collective French and European identity that ignores their perspective. They cannot completely escape representation like Julie does. To me, this is not simply a critique of French national identity and its over-reliance on universalist discourses of being, it is also a critique of the concept of a unified European experience and identity. As Jean-François Caron points out, France’s dominant conception of nationality, based on the ideals of unity under a universal ethos of cosmopolitanism and Enlightenment rationality, is a ‘microcosm’ of the ideology that brought about the European Union, representing European identity (2013, 231). Kechiche is not content to let the symbols of this privileged universality speak as they have always spoken, instead he appropriates them on behalf of a new generation of working-class citizens, who literally scream to be heard. What is unified here is their class consciousness; what the colour blue fractures from unity is the historical alignment of ‘liberty’ with the Enlightenment ethos.

What is also significant about this protest scene is that it is intimately linked to the preceding one depicting the aftermath of Adèle’s break-up with her first boyfriend

and her creeping consciousness that she is not sexually attracted to the opposite sex. For her, this is almost like a psychic break. We see her crying in a blue bed, amidst blue paraphernalia, in the suffocating intimacy of her bedroom, then immediately cut to this protest scene. It is a clear visual alignment of her personal sexual identity with a collective class identity. That is, her sexual desire is the impetus for a collective consciousness, suggesting that what is at stake here is also a politics of personal representation. Adèle does not yet know how to represent herself, what she is, what she wants to be, and how much this is a politicised matter in her society. She comes to the protest still an innocent about how these class issues affect her day-to-day life and the most intimate aspects of her body, pleasure, and personal relationships. However, when she meets Emma, the issue of representing oneself, questioning the universalist discourse, and the role of class politics in this, become clearer. Kechiche brings the politics of the protest into the narrative before her relationship with Emma can truly begin in order to show us that Adèle's learning curve is not simply about realising one's sexuality, but that the personal is political many other ways. This becomes evident in the scene where she and Emma first spend some time together, talking about philosophy while Emma, the artist, sketches Adèle.

Adèle and Emma are shown sitting in a park, with the atmosphere bucolic in tone. The soft, whispery wind caresses them in the same manner as their flirty, tentative words and gentle smiles, indicating a growing attraction. Emma is shown drawing Adèle's face, but she explains to her that she likes fragmenting the body in her art – that is, she likes to focus on details such as lips, eyes, and so on. While explaining this to Adèle, she quotes Jean-Paul Sartre and his philosophy of existentialism: 'the mysterious weakness of a man's face'. Adèle is quite clearly shown out of her depth; she lacks the sophisticated bourgeois language of philosophy Emma wields so seductively as a

flirting tool. She is also too straightforward to even consider a politics of representation. As she tells Emma that she tried reading Sartre but could not understand him, Emma tries to explain the basic tenants of existential philosophy to her, saying: 'He said we could choose our lives', revealing to Adèle that this philosophy helped shape her lesbian identity. The thing is, as we move later on to meet Emma's family, we realise that this is an open, liberal family, that prides itself on representation. In comparison to Adèle's parents who view food as basic nourishment, food is representative of art for them. The contrast between the two family dinners at Adèle's and Emma's houses could not be more explicitly drawn – the working-class family eats spaghetti and talks about finding jobs and getting married, while the bourgeois family talks about art and eats shellfish while philosophising its texture.

My point is, for Emma, what William Paulson calls Sartre's 'commitment to universal justice and freedom' in his existentialist philosophy (2003, 156), seems accessible and viable because she is in a social position where she is actually able to choose her own life and to represent herself. Choosing to live within her sexual identity honestly does not cut her off from her family, friends, and community, like it does for Adèle. She does not think about the practicalities of basic sustenance and menial jobs, because she does not have to. She can wallow in abstract representation and universal philosophy, because she is privileged enough to have the resources and time to do so. The class inequality that is present in their relationship is highlighted here through Emma's position of wielding the pen of representation. As an artist, she fragments Adèle's face, and later on, the rest of her body, moulding her into an object of art. In fact, Emma seems to employ the logic of male artists who fetishise and fragment the female body in art and cinema while ironically talking about loftier ideals of human

freedom and choosing your own identity. It is, I argue, an intended irony and hypocrisy that shapes the development of their romance in the latter half of the film.

Here, the personal movement of Adèle from heterosexuality to queerness and her personal discovery of bodily pleasure in Emma is encased in a tantalising blue; the light blue of Emma's eyes and denim jacket, and the darker blue of her hair, all shot in soft, glowing tints, and intimate close-ups. Emma's blue is also the blue of universal existentialism and the politics of representation. The two are not distinct – Adèle's desire, symbolised by blue, is also linked with the discomfort caused by the wider, collective identities Emma represents. What we realise is that like in the protest scene, Kechiche calls upon the historical symbolism of blue, and moves Adèle's individual desire outwards toward a wider representational politics that she will have to contend with as a working-class woman. How she contends with it in the latter half of the film will be explored in the next section of this article.

Ebbing in: the Subjective Politics of Individual Representation

If the first half of the film focuses primarily on widening Adèle's sexuality and desires outwards toward a collective class consciousness, I would argue that the second part – the second phase of Adele's life and maturation into adulthood – explores the tension between her class position and a politics of individual representation. Kechiche seems to be creating a deliberate binary tension between the awakening class consciousness and unity Adèle was being introduced to as a teenager, and the more postmodern intersectional social movements to which she is introduced through her relationship with Emma. But what specifically do I mean by 'postmodern intersectional social movements'? While Kechiche offers a critique of the Western Enlightenment

universalism of the past through a class consciousness, postmodern intersectional movements could be said to offer a critique of such universalist discourses through their politics of a more subjective form of representation that highlights difference and multiplicity, rather than sameness. Against the homogeneity of Enlightenment Humanism, the concept of ‘intersectionality’, as coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, posits the primacy of subjective experience, based on personal identity markers such as race, religion, and gender (Crenshaw 1991; see also, Paulson 2003, 159-61, on this subject).

Intersectionality essentially relies on the notion that multiple social and personal identities overlap and ‘intersect’, resulting in complex and layered forms of power and oppression across religious, racial, class, sexual, and gender lines, to name a few. While ostensibly, this approach seems to mirror Kechiche’s own use of class politics in the film (particularly in the earlier protest scene), I believe he also offers a critique of contemporary postmodern intersectionality and what he presents as its wallowing in an apolitical self, rather than trying to emulate it. In *Blue*, this is primarily explored through the politics of representation that Emma introduces Adèle to. There can be no better example of this than the gay pride parade she takes her to, which forms an opposite mode of social engagement to the previous, class-based protest Adèle attended with her peers.

Wolff aptly sums this scene up, noting that the openly political *On lâche rien* has been replaced for the pop and club tune *I Follow Rivers*, by the Swedish Lykke Li, and all ‘around Adèle swim white, bourgeois, homosexual couples... What was once political is now just a party’ (2013). And here lies the crux of the difference between Kechiche’s class consciousness and the contemporary intersectionality he critiques in the film – his is a distinctly political approach, seeking to galvanise the subject, while, it is fair to say, there is a strain within contemporary intersectional movements that simply

wallows in an apolitical representation of politics, rather than in the politics itself. It is reminiscent of a recent trend of placing political figures such as Che Guevara on trendy t-shirts sold to teenagers in stores such as Urban Outfitters without a wider context of who these figures actually are; that is, the film's gay pride parade is representative of a wider trend of commodification and aestheticisation of real political concerns, where representation and 'image' have taken over politics. While Kechiche may show us in the first protest scene that, as Paulson has noted, 'Identity- and community-based movements have... come into conflict with the tradition of... secularism and universality of the French Republic' (2003, 161), and indeed, of wider European identity, he also then moves on to consider, through Emma, how these movements have been co-opted as a bourgeois 'trend' or 'look'. Indeed, this gay pride parade scene supports arguments made by critics such as Lisa Duggan and Susan Stryker about the commodification and absorption of queer politics into the dominant, normative mode of capitalism and contemporary neoliberalism (see, Duggan 2003, 50; Stryker 2008). It is essentially the fashion-like 'pose' of intersectional and queer protest, without the substance of political uprising behind it.

Emma's politics of representation in the latter half of the film requires some close analysis to make this more explicit, and to consider just what role it plays in Kechiche's own representation of Adèle's subjectivity and freedom as an emblem for the modern times. I would like to quote here in full Wolff's astute evaluation of Emma's character, which I will then move on to unpack and extend:

Emma, by contrast [to Adèle], is master of representation... her look is suavely curated to express her lesbian identity and supposed engagement. Yet, for all her talk about Sartre, she is not political in any real sense. She expediently drops her blue hair towards the end of the film when it aids her career. Moreover, her belligerent insistence on lesbian 'politics' makes her blind to the exploitative

nature of her relationship with the much younger and lower-class Adèle. (Wolff 2013)

There is much to consider here and expand upon regarding Emma's use of representation as an exploitative tool that ironically appropriates the tropes of queer and lesbian identity politics. I wish to do so by focusing on the first scene that 'transitions' us in the film from Adèle's old life as a student in her parents' working-class home, to her new life as a teacher living with Emma. This scene depicts a party to celebrate Emma's work, to which all of her artist friends are invited. It begins with tender close-ups of Adèle's hands and face as she concentrates on cooking for the party. Dressed in a simple blue vest, we soon realise, upon seeing Emma, that any symbolic remnants of the colour blue have been transferred to Adèle's body and have left Emma's body, whose hair is now a pristine blonde, suggesting that for Emma, the 'liberty' of blue was always a superficial 'pose' of art, while for Adèle, it remains an untapped political potential she carries with her as part of her *self*. As Adèle is cooking, there is a striking shot of her as the camera pulls away from its previous close-ups; on the left of the screen we see Adèle's real body performing menial tasks in the kitchen, while on the right we see a representation of Adèle – one of Emma's paintings – in which she is naked and alluring in blue. The contrast between the working body and the idealised, fetishised body is distinctly drawn here. Both bodies are in blue, but they represent different types of 'blues' – that is, they represent different modes of being, one of which encompasses the 'doing' body as a blue-collar subject, while the other the objectification of the working-class and young female body as art.

As the scene progresses and Emma's friends arrive, they praise Emma for her 'work', barely registering that the work of menial domestic care they disparage has been performed quietly by Adèle behind the scenes. Emma's friends launch into an overly

pretentious discussion about art and female desire, with Adèle feeling distinctly out of place. Her rescue comes in the form of the blue-collar and Tunisian-born Samir – a guest at the party who like Adèle, feels awkward and out of place. Against the pretentious conversations of Emma's artist friends, which are mostly about abstract concepts, Adèle and Samir talk about Adèle's pasta and cooking. That is, they talk about concrete nourishment and the everyday. From this conversation, we learn that Samir is trying his luck as an actor in Hollywood to get by, but usually gets typecast as an Arab terrorist. In a playful manner, Kechiche sets him up as the male counterpart to Adèle – like her, he suffers from exploitation of his identity on behalf of an elite group of artists who wish to pigeon-hole him through aesthetic representation. He is, tellingly, the only one of the guests to serve Adèle food and help her out with her domestic chores – the rest of Emma's friends are happy to be served by her, and are clueless about the hypocrisy of their positions as artists supposedly championing loftier ideals while being served by someone they call Emma's 'muse'.

What is evident in this scene is that Emma and Adèle's relationship has formed an unequal power dynamic. For all of Emma's talk of freedom and justice and Sartre's universal philosophy helping her form a lesbian identity, thus bridging the gap between the collective and the personal in her head, she is completely unaware of how she has recreated the exploitation of the past in her private relationship. It is clear that she has fashioned Adèle as the muse and object of the relationship, while she wields the power to represent and 'guide' her. This is ironic in the sense that Emma later gets angry at someone for not understanding her art because he does not understand 'lesbian politics', and yet, she makes no real attempt to understand Adèle as an individual from a different social background to her, rather than as a represented fantasy for her art. For Adèle, her sense of subjective fulfilment can be found in things Emma and her friends disparage

and take for granted; in the mundane, everyday politics of the home and the school. She explains to Emma and her family that she loves teaching young children because education and reading many books opened her mind to a world she did not know existed, and she wants to help other working-class kids feel the same. It is through Adèle's love of reading and teaching that Kechiche actually represents, however tentatively, postmodern social movements in a positive light, which Paulson describes as the 'liberation from the condition of being spoken for and represented, of being an object rather than a subject of knowledge' (2003, 159). But more often than not, that form of liberation is taken away from Adèle, and she is instead represented and objectified by others.

What is clear in this party scene is that Kechiche is setting up a dual critique of past and present that all coalesce around the figure of Adèle. She walks around the party serving everyone like a blue beacon of potential. There is potential for her, for example, to end up with someone like Samir, or to stay with Emma, or to forge her own path alone. The blue colour on her body here takes on a different tone to previous symbolic incarnations. It is here Kristeva's blue of rupturing unity, seeking a sense of self and belonging that can come only before or beyond the representation of others. What is at stake here is not simply the question of what Adèle will become, but also, what France's and indeed Europe's youth will follow and grow into. How can we conceive of an individual freedom in the future if neither the universal philosophy of the past nor the social movements of the present have brought about a true 'liberation'? I do not think Kechiche provides clear answers to this in his film, but what he does in the ending scenes is provide us with questions, possibilities, and ideas to probe for the future.

Conclusion: Blue tears

Before I discuss the significance of the ending in *Blue*, I wish to return to the water scene with which I began this article. Coming at a transition point in the narrative and in Adèle's life after she has broken up with Emma, what strikes me about this scene after watching it numerous times is how it eludes fixity of representation. After all the various modes of representation Adèle endures, is a part of, and learns of, this water scene is a rare moment of nothingness; one can only feel as Adèle does, the light on her face, the blue water surrounding her, like respite. Throughout the film, she has been the object of representation, she has skirted around representation herself, with glimpses of possible freedoms to be herself, but she has never really eluded objectifying representation altogether. Here, she is free from meaning, she is not even a beautiful body, she simply *is*.

However, the ending of the film takes us back to representation. Adèle sees Emma one last time at an important art show opening, where images of Adèle are hung on the wall in blue, with her fragmented body parts providing the symbolic backdrop for her real body, in a blue dress. This scene is familiar. Once again, Adèle is at a party with Emma's friends. Once again, she feels awkward and out of place. Once again, she wanders alone in blue. Once again, she is cast in the role of 'muse' while Emma revels in her role as master of representation. In perhaps one of the most condescending and de-humanising moments of the film, a reporter asks Emma what her model is thinking about, finding her 'empty gaze' fascinating, while Adèle is standing right there. Emma launches into another abstract conversation, and Adèle walks away, only to run into Samir again, visibly upset.

The viewer, like Samir, knows that there is nothing 'empty' about Adèle's gaze; rather, she has been cast in the role of empty muse for the representational affect of

Emma's lesbian identity politics via art. That is, we know Emma is playing a game of representational politics that is as porous and slick as the blue that once coloured her hair, but which she discarded when it was no longer useful for her 'image'; unlike Adèle's blue, which is a constant, visible reminder of her subjective self. What the ending provides here is a counterpart to the 'nothingness' of Adèle in the water, free from someone else's utilisation of her body, contrasted against the cold 'emptiness' of this representation.

The narrative does not end there, however. As Adèle leaves the party in tears, Samir is the only one to notice and run after her. Wolff has a particular take on this ending, arguing that the camera 'gives its final shot to Samir', with Kechiche reuniting the working-class characters whose 'class-consciousness has been suppressed. Now, though, their eyes are open. If parts one and two of Adèle's life recount her romantic coming-of-age, by having the film end with Samir, Kechiche suggests that her political awakening may be next' (2013). Wolff's is the only account of the significance of the ending I have come across. However, I disagree with his interpretation, as Samir does not enjoy the actual last shots and images of the film – it is Adèle who does. What we see after Samir runs out after her is him walking in one direction in the streets, looking for her, while she is walking in the opposite direction, away from him and Emma. As she is shown walking in the street, she is bathed in the bluish tint that sometimes comes at sunset, all the more evident in her blue dress. It is hard to know what the symbolism of the blue represents here, and what kind of 'freedom' Kechiche carves out for his heroine, whose 'political awakening' already began before she met Emma, and was cut short when she became art, an object.

Wolff's reference to their eyes being open, to me, has different symbolic potential, as the blue in this last scene is also representative of Adèle's final tears,

falling from her eyes. This reminds me of the ending of Kieślowski's *Three Colours: Blue*, which shows a montage of images of birth and sex, reconciling Julie to life, the future, and pleasure, as she is shown crying tears of release in the last scene amidst a blue wash. These tears are cathartic, and they are also representative of European unity, being played out against her husband's score for the unification of Europe concert, which has as its central artistic theme the philosophy of *agape* – what Paul Santilli calls 'something like Christian love' (2006, 155), or love for your fellow man, but reconfigured in the blue symbolism of Kieślowski's film as personal civic freedom, unity, and hope, within a communal, collective love.

Adèle's final tears do not carry this type of freedom, they are the exact reverse; her tears are the freedom of isolation and movement away from unification, objectification, and representation. She literally walks away from us into the blue nothingness of Kristeva's 'decentring' and rupturing of unity. What kind of individual freedom does this envisage in the present? A suitably complex, contradictory, and undecided one. On the one hand, Kechiche seeks to radicalise his heroine with a class consciousness in this film, but on the other hand, he takes that away from her. On the one hand he introduces her to collective unity as a form of resistance, but on the other hand, he concludes her narrative through a symbol of isolation and individual freedom. On the one hand he proposes ways that individual considerations of place, belonging, education, economic realities, sexuality, religion, race, gender, and local community affect someone's access to individual freedom, but on the other hand, he shows us what a farce of representational aesthetics this has also become.

Essentially, Kechiche does not reconcile Adèle or the audience with any type of existing or inherited ideology; which is, in itself, an ideological position akin to Halperin's broad definition of 'queerness' as an 'identity without an essence'. Both the

European ideal of shared identity and the more subjective postmodern intersectional politics have failed people like Adèle; the former because it failed to address the particularities of intersectional identities of difference, and the latter because it has become absorbed into a middle-class exploitation of social movements and queerness. What we are left with is, therefore, failure from all sides as a mode of contemporary ideological reality. There is not a more apt image with which to represent the current times, where contemporary European countries like France are aware of the failures of both the past and present, but are unsure what to offer in their place. Is there a future for Adèle that allows her to just be, just as is there a future for the European citizen that encompasses multiple discourses and has to contend with multiple failures? Kechiche does not provide us with an answer to these questions, only a small symbolic gesture that as Adèle walks away into the nothingness, the ‘liberty’ of blue may possibly be reawakened in the future.

Notes

¹ ‘Beur Cinema’ commonly refers to films made by French directors of North-African descent.

² It is worthwhile pointing out that I have transcribed these lyrics directly from the film itself.

References

- Aftab, Kaleem. 2013. "Blue is the Warmest Colour Actresses on their Lesbian Sex Scenes: 'We felt like prostitutes'." *The Independent*, October 4. Accessed 3 July 2017. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/blue-is-the-warmest-colour-actresses-on-their-lesbian-sex-scenes-we-felt-like-prostitutes-8856909.html>
- Blue is the Warmest Colour*. Directed by Abdellatif Kechiche. France/Belgium/Spain: Quatsous Films/Wild Bunch, 2013.
- Caron, Jean-François. 2013. "Understanding and interpreting France's national identity: The meanings of being French." *National Identities* 15 (3): 223-37.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6): 1241-99.
- Daly, Eoin. 2013. "Political Liberalism and French National Identity in the Wake of the Face-Veiling Law." *International Journal of Law in Context* (9) 3: 366-85.
- Dargis, Manohla. 2013. "Jostling for Position in Last Lap at Cannes." *The New York Times*, May 23. Accessed 3 July 2017. www.nytimes.com/2013/05/24/movies/many-films-still-in-running-at-cannes-for-palme-dor.html
- Duggan, Lisa. 2003. *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Halperin, David. 1995. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hewitt, Nicholas. 2003. "Introduction: French Culture and Society in the Twentieth Century." In *The Cambridge Companion to Modern French Culture*, edited by Nicholas Hewitt, 1-16. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ivic, Sanja, and Dragan D. Lakicevic. 2011. "European Identity: Between Modernity and Postmodernity." *Innovation—The European Journal of Social Science Research* 24 (4): 395-407.
- Jones, Kristin M. 2013. "Review: *Blue Is the Warmest Color*." *Film Comment*. Accessed 3 July 2017. <https://www.filmcomment.com/article/review-blue-is-the-warmest-color-abdellatif-kechiche/>

- Kristeva, Julia. 1980. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.
- LaSalle, Mick. “‘Blue is the Warmest Color’ A Masterpiece.” *Times Union*, November 14. Accessed 3 July 2017. <http://www.timesunion.com/living/article/Blue-is-the-Warmest-Color-a-masterpiece-4983466.php>
- Lee, Janet. 2013. “Film Review: ‘Blue Is The Warmest Color’.” *Neon Tommy: Annenberg Digital News*, October 22. Accessed 3 July 2017. <http://www.neontommy.com/news/2013/10/film-review-blue-warmest-color>
- Maroh, Julie. 2013. “Le bleu d’Adèle.” *Cœurs-forêts: le site de Julie Maroh*, May 27. Accessed 3 July 2017. <http://www.juliemaroh.com/2013/05/27/le-bleu-dadele/>
- Maroh, Julie. 2015. *Blue is the Warmest Color*. Translated by Ivanka Hahenberger. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Mayer, Sophie. 2015. “Review: *Blue is the Warmest Colour*.” *Sight & Sound Magazine*, February 20. Accessed 3 July 2017. <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/reviews-recommendations/blue-warmest-colour>
- Nonrindr, Panivong. 2012. “The Cinematic Practice of a ‘Cinéaste Ordinaire’: Abdellatif Kechiche and French Political Cinema.” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 16 (1): 55-68.
- Paulson, William. 2003. “Intellectuals.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Modern French Culture*, edited by Nicholas Hewitt, 145-64. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Roberts, Soraya. 2013. “‘Blue Is the Warmest Color’ is about class, not just sex.” *The Salon*, November 3. Accessed 3 July 2017. http://www.salon.com/2013/11/03/blue_is_the_warmest_color_is_about_class_not_just_sex/
- Romney, Jonathan. 2013. “Abdellatif Kechiche interview: ‘Do I need to be a woman to talk about love between women?’” *The Guardian*, October 27. Accessed 3 July 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/oct/27/abdellatif-kechiche-interview-blue-warmest>
- Santilli, Paul C. 2006. “Cinema and Subjectivity in Krzysztof Kieślowski.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64 (1): 147-56.
- Stern, Marlow. 2013. “The Stars of ‘Blue is the Warmest Color’ On the Riveting Lesbian Love Story.” *The Daily Beast*, January 9. Accessed 3 July 2017.

- <http://www.thedailybeast.com/the-stars-of-blue-is-the-warmest-color-on-the-riveting-lesbian-love-story>
- Stryker, Susan. 2008. "Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity." *Radical History Review* 100: 145-57.
- Three Colours: Blue*. Directed by Krzysztof Kieślowski. France/Poland/Switzerland: MK2 Productions/CED Productions/France 3 Cinema, 1993.
- Weisman, Aly. 2013. "The Film That Won Cannes Is Being Blasted By Its Writer As 'Porn'." *Business Insider*, May 29. Accessed 3 July 2017.
<http://www.businessinsider.com/blue-is-the-warmest-color-author-slams-film-that-won-cannes-2013-5>
- Williams, James S. 2011. "Open-sourcing French Culture: The Politics of métissage and Collective Reappropriation in the Films of Abdellatif Kechiche." *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 14 (3): 397-421.
- Wilson, Emma. 1998. "*Three Colours: Blue*: Kieslowski, Colour and the Postmodern Subject." *Screen* 39 (4): 349-62.
- Wolff, Spencer. 2013. "Buried in the Sand: The Secret Politics of *Blue Is the Warmest Color*." *The Huffington Post*, August 11. Accessed 3 July 2017.
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/spencer-wolff/buried-in-the-sand_b_4237379.html